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President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 32 (*continued*)

United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations

Report of the Secretary-General
(A/55/492/Rev.1)

Draft resolution (A/55/L.30)

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to come before the General Assembly to participate on behalf of my country in the discussion of the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, in which much work has been done to bring together the different points of view of different cultures and peoples. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report, as I also extend my thanks to the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Mr. Picco, for his special endeavours to make the Year a success.

This issue was first presented by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. Among other things, the Assembly at that session called for efforts to enhance closeness among countries and respect for human rights. Since then, the issue has enjoyed the respect and appreciation of all Member States, as it calls for a dialogue among all civilizations. Such a dialogue will no doubt bring good to the peoples of the world by establishing appropriate foundations for international peace and security. As long as channels and bridges of communication exist between different cultures and religions, better understanding of the concerns and problems of others will prevail. Once they come into contact, civilizations can understand and appreciate the extent to which they can deal with specific issues of concern to other civilizations.

The Millennium Summit made it possible for the leaders of the world to meet and issue a statement expressing the aspirations of the peoples of the world to work on enhancing the culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations. That meeting was a victory for the principle of dialogue between different visions and ways of thinking. In fact, it was an excellent opportunity to exchange views and hold bilateral meetings between the leaders of the world, and as such it can be considered to have contributed to bringing about better dialogue among civilizations.

The General Assembly did not deem that meeting to be enough and so another meeting was held on the sidelines in the form of a roundtable. That roundtable focused on the issue of dialogue among civilizations and included a number of world leaders, in addition to a group of elite pioneers in human accomplishment. Because of the importance my country attaches to the dialogue among civilizations, and because of the ultimate good it brings to all nations, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of the State of Qatar, could not pass up the opportunity to participate effectively with his peers in this very important meeting. At the roundtable meeting he made

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a statement in which he explained the importance of the dialogue. I would like to quote from the beginning of the statement made by His Highness:

> "The choice of the dialogue among civilizations as an issue for this roundtable at the sidelines of the activities of the United Nations Millennium Summit is an excellent choice due to the great importance this issue represents in the post-cold-war world".

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait), Vice-President, took the Chair.

From that statement it is clear that this is a genuine call to build a new world after the end of the cold war, which drove a wedge between the countries of the world and divided it into sections. That division led to an arms race and to the polarization of most countries to one of two blocs. That was quite clearly the case in Europe, which was divided into eastern and western parts. With the end of the cold war we have an opportunity to bring together the various points of view of the different parties. The results have been reflected in the global reality the world was looking forward to: to mobilize efforts to bring about real development.

I would also like to focus on the conclusion of the statement made by His Highness at the roundtable:

> "The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, for example, could manage a dialogue among different parties in order to enhance the various humanitarian relations among cultures on three levels. The first level would include scientific activities and courses in history, politics and sociology to take up what is said to be the conflict between civilizations; the second would include bringing about a better reflection of different cultures in the mass media, an activity that could be extended to educational institutions and school curriculums — particularly those aimed at children during the beginning of their education; the third level would include calling upon politicians and statesmen of different cultural groups to bring their points of view closer together so as to minimize the risks of confrontation between them."

Qatar has shown its willingness and readiness to participate in all those activities, in particular when they include recommendations that could be implemented in the real world.

I would like to emphasize what His Highness said, namely, that the State of Qatar would like to host the second meeting of the group of eminent persons, whose first meeting will take place in Brazil. The State of Qatar will provide the group with every facility to ensure the success of their meeting.

Mr. Mousboutas (Cyprus): We would like to express our appreciation by commending the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran for making possible the initial inscription on the agenda of the General Assembly of this important item entitled "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations". We regard the inscription of that item on the agenda as timely, and the idea visionary. Considering the fact that recently many conflicts use diversity as an excuse for conflict, the opportunity exists at this historic period for mankind to renew its resolve to promote dialogue in pursuit of coexistence, unity and peace.

We are well advanced into a new century and a new millennium. We should visualize a world that is even more inter-dependent and technologically advanced that the present one; a world in which every aspect of human interchange — political, economic and social — is globalized.

Societies and cultures are not and cannot be isolated entities. A local crisis in a place far removed from our borders or shores unfailingly and immediately affects us all. We are part, it seems, of the same global village, where our actions or omissions, our deeds or misdeeds affect everyday life everywhere. Distances are disappearing, and close interaction, at lightning speed, is ever present and ever growing. In such a world, promoting cooperation, tolerance and understanding among and within countries, cultures and religions is not only a good policy; it is a choice for survival, especially in the light of ominous predictions by some of "clashes of civilizations".

The world has experienced much destruction and human misery in the last 100 years. The twentieth century was marked more by confrontation than by cooperation. It has been correctly observed that today the majority of conflicts where United Nations peacekeeping operations take place have ethnic, tribal or religious bases. Militant separatism forms one of the root causes of conflict in our turbulent world. As the

wise Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Giandomenico Picco, has said, just as in the 1990s, many who went to war use the threat of diversity as justification for conflict. Perhaps in the future, he has further observed, those who seek peace will use the spirit of dialogue among civilizations as means to move forward. Common sense dictates that the calamities which we have brought upon ourselves in the past and in the present should be avoided and that peace and cooperation should replace confrontation and war.

It is imperative, therefore, that we strengthen the bonds of the common destiny of mankind. The item under consideration aims at that goal. The Charter of the United Nations considers dialogue as the sine qua non for harmonizing human relations and resolving differences in relations among States. The Charter furthermore places dialogue at the highest peak of human endeavour aimed at the effective solution of international problems.

As we have said in previous debates on this important item, we consider the initiative of His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Khatami, the President of Iran, to be wise and timely. We must institutionalize dialogue among peoples of different cultures and civilizations if we are to serve the cause of peace and justice. The many positive and mutually beneficial interactions among civilizations must be underlined and must form the basis of educating the young. Due respect for the cultures, religions and values of others must be imbedded in their minds. We need to explain the benefits of cultural pluralism and of the mutual enrichment of civilizations. It is time also to address concerns about tendencies to portray specific religions and cultures as threats to peace and coexistence.

Our survival ultimately depends on our success in convincing the international community peacefully to settle differences and disputes through dialogue in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter, and to promote dialogue as the accepted mode of behaviour.

It is through dialogue that my Government is committed to solving the problem of Cyprus. We strive for a peaceful solution, where the two communities can live in peace and harmony as they have done for centuries in the past, without occupation troops or barbed wire.

It is with those thoughts in mind that we have again joined in sponsoring a draft resolution on this item: draft resolution A/55/L.30, introduced by Iran. It contains the elements necessary for promoting dialogue through organizing and implementing cultural, educational and social programmes by Governments and non-governmental organizations.

We intend to participate fully in the programmes proposed for the year 2001, the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, thus supporting in a practical way the initiative which so wisely and so fortunately has been presented to us.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): The report of the Secretary-General on a dialogue among civilizations, contained in document A/55/492/Rev.1, contains the following quotation: "'Our world has never been more integrated, more vulnerable and more unequal'" (*para. 6*). The complex challenges that today's world offers must be addressed through an inclusive process that takes into account different opinions and ideas and that steers us towards harmony and hope in our journey together.

We see dialogue among civilizations as a response to the need for a framework in that inclusive journey. Its relevance is felt particularly in addressing the tensions and divisions resulting from processes of globalization. Those tensions are essentially linked to perceptions of diversity in a globalized world. As the report observes, the perception of diversity as threat is at the very origin of war and causes so many blindly to overlook the common humanity that unites us all.

As human beings and civilizations are drawn towards each other, their differences can potentially breed conflicts. The objective of globalization must not be to promote uniformity. That would be a sure recipe for disaster: the efforts to subdue diversity would result in conflict. I shall not catalogue the miseries that efforts towards uniformity have brought to millions; they are simply too many.

Therefore, our objective cannot be anything but to promote dialogue across cultures, societies and beliefs to address the root causes of conflict. The rich diversity of the world's civilizations can and should be unitized for global harmony and peace, rather than for clashes and conflict. As history has shown, great civilizations have always flourished by sharing their ideas and experiences with other civilizations.

In our globalized world, modern technology has intensified and promoted inter-cultural exchanges, largely unimpeded and at unprecedented speed. The world seems smaller, and distances matter less and less. The idea of distant civilizations with unique practices, beliefs and values that must be eliminated is unrealistic in today's globalized world. Advances in technology and communications have not only brought us together; our world is indeed a global village with a shared destiny for all. Everyone therefore must promote converging values that are common to all humankind. These values — tolerance, understanding and respect for the other — are not only essential; they are the only choice for survival. Such universal values are the embodiment of the collective wisdom, insights and experiences emanating from all civilizations. They provide the rich soil in which dialogue among civilizations can flourish.

We recognize the value of dialogue across all divides, and in its broadest manifestations. We welcome the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, to be observed in 2001. We believe it will act as a catalyst for the beginning of real dialogues that will result in concrete achievements.

Here Bangladesh would like to take the opportunity to extend special thanks to Mr. Giandomenico Picco, the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, for his very creative and articulate initiatives in this regard. The United Nations, which represents our diversity, must institutionalize dialogue for promoting peace and harmony. The objective of dialogue is to inform peoples of different cultures and civilizations of the benefits of cultural pluralism and exchange. It is necessary to promote dialogue as the accepted mode of behaviour for settling disputes and differences.

To develop and sustain a real dialogue, we must expand it beyond the confines of the United Nations and State-to-State interaction. Civil society has to be proactively involved; communities must take it up. Academia and the media are important vehicles for advancing dialogue. Most importantly, the dialogue must take place at the people-to-people level if it is to sustain and pick up momentum for benefiting humanity.

Let me conclude by expressing our deep appreciation to the Islamic Republic of Iran and pay special tribute to President Mohammad Khatami for his visionary leadership in promoting dialogue among civilizations. All of us are in deep debt to Iran for advancing such a worthy cause for the benefit of humankind.

Bangladesh has the pleasure of sponsoring draft resolution A/55/L.30, and we believe that it will be possible to adopt it by consensus.

Ms. Chan (Singapore): Let me begin by affirming Singapore's full support for the ideals represented by the dialogue among civilizations. For its entire 200-year history, modern Singapore has been one of the crossroads and marketplaces where the world's civilizations have met. We are fervent believers in the need for and value of peaceful interaction among civilizations.

This need is more urgent now than at any time in the past. Once upon a time, civilizations could exist in relative isolation, each in their specific geographical regions. Interaction between them, while quite extensive, was generally limited to trade among specialized elites or to war. The great civilizations of the Americas, for instance, were utterly isolated from those of Asia and Europe for most of their history.

For the last four centuries, however, interaction between civilizations — often, but not always, of a violent nature — has been increasing. This development accelerated throughout the twentieth century, and continues to gain impetus through the process of globalization. The great difference from the past is that knowledge and experience of other civilizations is no longer limited to a small minority. Anyone with access to a television, radio or newspaper has information about other societies and peoples that would have been utterly unimaginable only a few generations ago. The growth of information technology has accelerated this process enormously.

The practical problems of a formal dialogue among civilizations are obvious. How is membership of a particular civilization to be assessed? What are the criteria for defining a civilization? Who could conceivably claim to speak for a whole civilization? Furthermore, within every civilization there are many different streams of opinion and belief, some of them mutually contradictory. How are these different and sometimes opposing views within every civilization to be accommodated? The dialogue among civilizations

must also take account of the need for a dialogue within civilizations.

The solution to the problem must lie in recognizing that the dialogue among civilizations cannot be limited to States, peoples or religions alone. Just as civilizations are not monolithic blocs, but amorphous entities comprising elements of history, geography, ethnicity, religion, custom and politics, so a dialogue among civilizations must take place at many levels. The United Nations, as an organization of States, is best placed to engage in the dialogue among civilizations at the level of States and their official organs. It can also assist and coordinate dialogue at other levels, between States and parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society. The work of the InterAction Council, for instance, a non-governmental organization whose members are prominent political figures from every major region of the world, is an example of the rich possibilities of the dialogue among civilizations. Within the United Nations system itself, Singapore fully supports the work of Mr. Giandomenico Picco, the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and will do its utmost to assist him in any way possible.

At the same time, we should recognize that the dialogue among civilizations is already going on at levels other than those of States. Individuals, companies and other organizations of all kinds are already engaging in a de facto dialogue among civilizations. Every company that enters a foreign market to do business, every individual who goes abroad to live and work, is also a participant in this dialogue, whether consciously or not.

Before the existence of modern means of transport and communication, most people spent their lives very close to where they were born. Nine out of ten people in the world still live within 100 miles of their birthplace. But many are leaving their birthplace out of desire or economic necessity to seek work and live in foreign countries. The mass movements of populations in the twentieth century, whether of refugees or economic migrants, caused and are still causing a great intermingling of different societies. The political, economic and social stresses that these great movements have caused are a primary reason why the dialogue among civilizations is so important. As individuals and societies experience other civilizations for themselves, many will also experience confusion, uncertainty and even fear. Deep-rooted beliefs and values may be questioned. Some will survive and be stronger for having been challenged. Others will change in unpredictable ways. Our common task is to ensure that this process takes place not, as in the past, through violence and aggression, but in reason and in peace.

Hatred and mistrust of what is different is an enduring feature of human society. It even had some degree of survival value in the past, when communities were small and survival was precarious. However, fear and distrust of the outside world are no longer useful for any nation or people that wishes to prosper and develop economically. It is widely recognized that integration with the outside world, rather than isolation, is the necessary path to both prosperity and security. Unfortunately, old tribal attitudes continue to manifest themselves, whether in outright slaughter or in the constant low-level ethnic and racial tensions that fester even in the richest and most developed societies. As the philosopher Bertrand Russell noted,

> "Religion, morality, economic self-interest, the mere pursuit of biological survival — all supply to our intelligence unanswerable arguments in favour of worldwide cooperation. But the old instincts that have come down to us from our tribal ancestors rise up in indignation, feeling that life would lose its savour if there were no-one to hate."

It is easy to say that diversity must be respected. It is much harder to actually do. Tolerance is not an easy virtue. It requires us to acknowledge the existence and validity of views and practices with which we disagree, or that we find actively abhorrent. In this era of growing interdependence, however, it is a virtue that we can no longer live without. We are all obliged, for our own sakes, to show, as America's founding fathers said in the Declaration of Independence, "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind", whether we agree with those opinions or not.

The great challenge is not just intolerance of diversity, but the incapacity to imagine that true diversity exists. There is within many cultures and individuals an actual inability to comprehend that genuine differences of opinion can exist that are not caused by either stupidity or malice. While the human race is one race and one species, we should not lie to

ourselves. Our common humanity manifests itself in ways that are infinitely variable, and therefore not necessarily mutually compatible. The dialogue among civilizations must be conducted in the full realization that not all values are universal. Even where they are, different cultures will give them different priority according to their different circumstances. We must recognize that, as the philosopher John Kekes said, a conflict of values is

> "not a crisis produced by our adversary's stupidity, wickedness or perversity, but merely another manifestation of the unavoidable conflicts that will continually occur if values are plural, conditional, incommensurable and incompatible".

The true value of a dialogue among civilizations is to find areas of common ground where they exist and to help us peacefully manage the areas of irreducible incompatibility.

Mr. Knyazhinskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): May I begin by thanking the delegation of Iran for the inclusion of this very topical issue on the agenda of this session. I would like also to thank Giandomenico Picco, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for the very important contribution he has made with respect to this issue.

The development of a dialogue among civilizations is a prerequisite in the task of promoting strategic stability. As the President of Russia, Mr. Putin, stated at the Millennium Summit.

> "We must move to peace, stability and prosperity by relying on the entire wealth of cultures and traditions. In the twenty-first century, the right to national self-expression and independence must continue with dignity to supplement already-recognized approaches to the solution of basic problems. Democracy in international relations means first and foremost unswerving compliance with the fundamental norms of international law. It is an awareness of the entire diversity of global civilization, a recognition of and respect for that diversity." *(A/55/PV.3, p. 11)*

Indeed, a very important element is the recognition that we live in a multifaceted world.

Today, as the process of globalization is gaining speed, we must persist in the attempt to bring about a rapprochement between civilizations that will lead to interaction and mutual enrichment. If we recognize that such a basis exists and that it is needed to uphold law and order in a rapidly changing world, then we must reject myths and stereotypes. Myths, we believe, arise from the conviction that one civilizational model is superior to all others, leading to an attempt to assert the superiority of such model and to make it a dominant factor in development. Stereotypes arise when we view as beyond the pale of civilization everything that does not fall within our own standard framework of understanding.

We agree with the conclusions of the report (A/55/492) of the Secretary-General on "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations", in which he states that the starting point for serious reflection on dialogue among civilizations is the understanding of diversity. It is through this diversity — through recognizing, respecting and encouraging it — that the community of nations can avert the kind of cataclysms it experienced during the twentieth century.

Pluralism serves to ease tensions, both within a single society and at the points of contact between different societies. Russia believes that we should build a democratic, multipolar system of international relations. Of course, the interests of States are different, so it is important to find a common denominator, which can be a difficult and painstaking task.

But there is no other path we can take. Any attempt to measure everything by the same yardstick is bound to be counterproductive and to overlook the lessons of history. It is important that we should seek together ways of regulating the processes that provide for stability in the world, and one of the ways to do this is to strengthen the potential of the United Nations as a unique and irreplaceable mechanism for international relations.

The development of society cannot take place if we do not agree on shared goals — material, spiritual and moral. Russia's unity is strengthened by our nation's inherent cultural traditions and a shared sense of history. Today, in our country, we are seeing a renewed interest in the nation's history; in our roots, which we all value; and in our cultural identity and moral and spiritual principles, which are embodied in

our democratic structures and evidence in Russia's openness to the outside world.

In Russia, the International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations received wide support. Its celebration coincided with national events to usher in the third millennium, a fact that we deem very symbolic. That topic received close attention at the meeting held in July of this year in St. Petersburg — the world congress entitled "Conclusions of the Millennium".

One of the most important events of the year was the meeting on a dialogue among civilizations, held on 5 September at United Nations Headquarters at the level of head of State. There is no doubt that the conclusions of this discussion contributed significantly to a creative understanding and to the development of the concept of dialogue among civilizations.

Unity in diversity: this universal human law reflects the essence of civilization, and any negation of this principle will turn the clock back to the days of barbarity.

Mr. Serksnys (Lithuania): It is my honour to speak on this important agenda item, "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations". My Government fully supports, and is very grateful to, the initiator of this item, the Islamic Republic of Iran. We align ourselves with the statement delivered by France on behalf of the European Union.

Dialogue among civilizations, as well as among individuals, should be based on mutual tolerance and on respect for different views and approaches. Furthermore, it should not be restricted to a dialogue among countries or regions. The roots of tolerance lie in civilization itself. Since the Middle Ages, in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, tolerance, freedom of speech, and self-expression have been the predominant trends in the life of Lithuanian society. This is evident from the number of books in different languages — Latin, Belarusian, Polish, Hebrew and so on — that have been published in Vilnius since 1522. These traditions have extended throughout the ages, and today, as before, Lithuania remains open to the world.

We live in a multipolar world. Different nations all have their own history, traditions, cultural heritage and stereotypes — in a word, identity — which are fundamental to that nation. To eliminate the identity of a nation is the same as eliminating that nation itself. The observance and promotion of human rights and of the fundamental freedoms enshrined in universal international instruments help to foster national cultures.

Dialogue among civilizations is an important tool for the creation of global confidence and peace. Different cultures have the right to find their places in the world and contribute to the heritage of mankind.

In 1999 Lithuania, Poland, Honduras and Paraguay, supported by Greece and Bolivia, submitted to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) General Conference, at its thirtieth session, a draft resolution concerning the organization of a regional conference in Lithuania on the theme of dialogue among civilizations. After the adoption of the resolution Lithuania proceeded to prepare a joint Lithuania-UNESCO conference, which will take place in April 2001. It is a great privilege and honour for Lithuania to host this international conference on dialogue among civilizations, which Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, has kindly agreed to co-chair.

The upcoming Vilnius conference will bring together leading intellectuals in relevant fields from all around the world. Being the only such regional conference in Europe, with participants coming from other continents as well, the Vilnius conference will be a major event in the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

This September, while meeting with Mr. Koichiro Matsuura in New York, the President of Lithuania, Mr. Valdas Adamkus, proposed — and Mr. Matsuura agreed — to invite to the Vilnius conference the heads of States of countries from the various regions of the world. The President of Poland, Mr. Aleksander Kwasniewski, also has agreed to support the conference and co-chair it.

At its conclusion, the Vilnius conference will wish to adopt a Vilnius declaration as a first basic step towards reflecting on how to pursue an authentic dialogue of civilizations during and beyond the United Nations Year.

Mr. Enkhsaikhan (Mongolia): At the outset, I wish to express my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for the preparation of the report on this item.

In November 1998 the General Assembly adopted resolution 53/22, by which it proclaimed the year 2001 the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. I am pleased to reiterate Mongolia's high appreciation of that decision and its readiness to participate in the programme activities to commemorate the Year and make its own contribution. In this connection, I would like to join the previous speakers in expressing gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran for its important initiative, and to the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for the United Nations Year for the efforts that have been made to make the Year as productive and successful as possible.

It is gratifying to note that the General Assembly's call for a dialogue among civilizations has been well received across the world. As is indicated in the Secretary-General's report, governmental and academic institutions and non-governmental organizations have already been conducting seminars, debates and research projects on this issue, bringing together a variety of civil society groups. Among these meetings, I wish to single out the importance of the round table held at the level of heads of State, here at the United Nations last September. I am confident that meetings like this will enable us to generate an exchange of very important, interesting and useful ideas. In this regard, my delegation associates itself with others who have paid particular tribute to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for its leading role in and contribution to the preparations for the Year.

We live in a world that is both unique and diverse, that is rich in its cultural and civilizational diversity. In this world, active and mutually enriching dialogues and exchanges between civilizations are of great importance, not only in exploring one another's rich legacies, but also in forecasting the future. As mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, diversity is the concept underlying a focused reflection on dialogue among civilizations. We fully share the view that the perception of diversity as a threat is at the very heart of many wars and conflicts. On the other hand, however, diversity is also the wealth of humankind. Therefore, learning how to address diversity has become a more compelling necessity as our world has grown smaller and our interaction more intense and, indeed, unavoidable.

The importance of our discussion today lies not only in the fact that the subject matter is extremely important, but also because its consideration at this session of the General Assembly reflects a determination of Member States to enter the new millennium with a new common approach based on common understanding. From our deliberations here, from the statements made by representatives of different civilizations, we can feel that dialogue and the exchange of ideas can make a valuable contribution to an improved awareness and better understanding of common values. The international community should therefore work towards promoting a norm of interaction and relations between nations based on dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect, so as to maintain peace and security and encourage development and social progress throughout the world.

We are living in an age of what is known as "accelerating globalization". Globalization of the economy, of culture and of thought and increasing interdependence among nations compel us to form a new vision of international relations that is based on the spirit of peace, tolerance, dialogue and solidarity. As Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, rightly pointed out in his address at the round table on the dialogue among civilizations, "globalization must be humanized, harnessed to the yearnings of men and women, not the other way around". In this regard I fully share his view that "through education, we must learn to recognize what each culture owes to all other cultures. Awareness of each others' strands in our common heritage contributes to [lifting] curtains of ignorance, scorn and hate, and weaves a richer legacy for all of us".

My delegation fully shares the view that every nation, country and region, and every culture, should offer others the best of its own and in return accept from others the best of what they have to share. In the case of Mongolia, it has inherited the rich culture of an ancient nomadic civilization. As members might be well aware, Mongolia is considered to be the *locus classicus* of nomadic civilization today. Over the years, efforts have been made in our country to develop further studies on various aspects of nomadic civilization, its influence and interaction with other civilizations, and on preserving and revitalizing the historical and cultural heritage of the Mongols. Nomadic civilization is known for its ability to adapt to nature and live in harmony with it. Therein lie its

strength and perhaps its contribution to future generations.

Mongolia actively cooperated and participated in numerous activities of UNESCO to promote cultural dialogue among civilizations. Thus Mongolian scholars have made and are continuing to make their contribution through their active participation in UNESCO's programme on the preparation of the history of civilizations of Central Asia, in the project entitled "Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue", among others.

A major event of recent years was the establishment by UNESCO of the International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations, in Mongolia. The Institute aims to initiate and implement activities which will, on the one hand, preserve the unique historical and cultural heritage of nomads, and, on the other, contribute to developing appropriate elements of modernization in an effort to improve the way of life of nomadic peoples. For thousands of years nomads have inhabited vast territories of the world. Nomadic societies have devised a form of culture particularly suited to their environment and to the need for mobility, reflecting the demands and necessities of such a way of life. They have made an undeniable contribution to the development of different techniques and ways of using land. Pastoral nomadism, for example, remains the surest safeguard against environmental degradation and desertification in some parts of the world.

The observance in 2001 of the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations is expected to make a significant contribution to promoting further the concept of dialogue among civilizations, cooperation and interaction between different civilizations of the world. Mongolia will be keenly interested in participating in the programme activities within the framework of the Year in developing further its cooperation with other States.

Mr. Lancry (Israel): The State of Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people, represents and embodies a noble civilization, the Jewish civilization, that is almost 4,000 years old and has ancient roots in the Middle East.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, which has propounded this initiative to promote a dialogue among civilizations, has repeatedly stressed the vital importance of the "Great Books" to this dialogue. We agree, and believe that the Jewish Bible, the "Old Testament", serves as a case in point. Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other monotheistic religions all derive their foundations from the same source.

The earliest books of the Jewish Bible were the product of the thousand-year era of the experience of the people of Israel building their national identity in their historic homeland. They cover the period from Abraham the forefather, who first came to the Promised Land, to Jeremiah the prophet, who was led captive into the Babylonian exile.

The later books of the Bible — Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther — were written at the height of the classical age of Persian-Jewish relations and profoundly reflect the historic connection between these two civilizations. The close cooperation that existed between the Jewish leadership and the royal courts of Cyrus and Darius are a matter of biblical record. Cyrus and Darius are, to this day, remembered in the Jewish tradition as symbols of tolerance and pluralism.

The return of the Jewish people from their exile and the re-establishment of their homeland in Judea provided the historic background for the commonality of Christianity and Judaism. The interrelationship of the two religions has been the focus of a recent renewed fervour of theological and historical research. Indeed, in Alexandria, Egypt, the Septuagint, the era's meticulous translation of the Jewish Bible into Greek, compiled by 70 of the most prominent Jewish scholars of the time, provided the conduit for the propagation of the Judeo-Christian foundations into Europe and beyond.

The essential building block of Jewish legal doctrine, the Talmud, was composed in the Jewish academies of Babylon following the second exile of the Jewish people from its homeland. In this context, Judaism took on a vibrant role in the culture of the Middle East. To this very day, Jewish scholars and schoolchildren alike study the Talmud in its original language, Aramaic, and apply the Persian didactic method which was prevalent at that time.

The masters of Jewish philosophy and poetry, Maimonidis, Nachmanidis and Judah HaLevy, were the products of the golden era of Jewish-Muslim dialogue. In that period, Jewish communities abounded and flourished from Spain to Baghdad. The interchange of ideas and philosophies between the civilizations was

part and parcel of the great Islamic scholarly revolution of that time.

Morocco is a case in point. The millennium of Jewish-Muslim coexistence in that country yielded a rich and often fascinating dialogue between the two religions and cultures. In order to make their works more accessible to all, the scholars of Moroccan Jewry composed many of their writings in the Arabic language. The poetry of Jewish women penned in Arabic was commonplace and drew its inspiration and timbre from the contemporary poetic genre, which is still very much a part of modern Moroccan culture. Anyone seeking evidence of the quality of Jewish-Muslim coexistence in Morocco can find more than ample illustrations of the friendship and tolerance that existed between the cultures, indicating the profound depth of the common foundations which the communities established.

Similarly, Jewish mysticism was expounded, and the scholarly discourse of the masters of biblical commentary of medieval Europe abounded, in medieval Europe. These endeavours were steeped in the experience of the Jewish people's interaction with the Christian world.

These are but a few examples which illustrate how the dialogue between the Jewish people and the nations of the globe has been an unceasing phenomenon of humankind for the last 4,000 years. All of these cultures contributed to, and benefited from, the relationships they maintained with each other.

The Jewish people, throughout its ancestral heritage, and in its modern reincarnation, which is the State of Israel, was and remains fully open to the dialogue among civilizations, and is committed to it, in the firm conviction that it, too, will be included in the family of nations and cultures without reservation or ambiguity. That is why my country joined the consensus in the last session of the General Assembly on this resolution and still fully supports the concept of a dialogue among civilizations and cultures and commends its promotion.

This concept, by its very nature, is predicated upon its universality. It can have meaning, especially in the context of the United Nations, only when no one country or civilization is ever singled out for exclusion. If international peace and understanding are the true aim of this exercise, the United Nations cannot accept an act of ostracism. Yet that, unfortunately, has been the case.

We must record with regret that the very State sponsoring this otherwise admirable proposal to further develop the theme of "dialogue among civilizations" is itself practising a policy that singles out, of all countries of the world, one Member State, my own, and calls for its liquidation. In his statement in the general debate on 15 September, Iranian Minister for Foreign Affairs Kharazzi thus described his vision of the emerging world culture:

> "The answer is participation and not assimilation and imposition ... recognition of the right of nations and peoples to preserve and nourish their culture and cultural identity ... [I]t is essential to recognize and respect cultural rights of individuals and communities." (*A/55/PV.16, p. 29*)

Yet, five days earlier, Foreign Minister Kharrazi made very clear that my country has no place in this world culture, stating to Iranian Television that Israel "is nothing more than a cancerous growth in the region". In this regard, he was merely repeating the phraseology often used by Iran's spiritual leader Khamenei, who, for example, has stated:

> "Iran will never recognize the treacherous Zionist regime, even for an instant, and will continue to fight against this malignant growth."

These statements are two of many such examples of the negation of Israel by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Nevertheless, Israel will again join in the consensus in support of the principle of dialogue among civilizations, insisting on its universal application to all mankind, without discrimination.

Mr. Sun (Republic of Korea): In the past few years, "dialogue among civilizations" has become a household phrase, not just in diplomatic circles, but in journalism and academia as well. Dialogue among civilizations has come to be broadly acclaimed as an essential component of a culture of peace and, indeed, an important basis for a new paradigm of international cooperation.

My delegation is appreciative of the initiatives taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran in this process, in particular its initiative for introducing a draft resolution on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among

Civilizations. My delegation supports the draft resolution.

Each civilization of the world can become a precious asset to humanity by basing itself on a respect for diversity and pluralism that goes beyond its own traditional values to embrace universal values. The task before us is how and in what direction the dialogue among civilizations should be pursued. I believe that one half of the answer lies in the relevance of the United Nations. The United Nations, created as a forum for institutionalized dialogue among nations, is aptly positioned to address this question.

The leaders of the world, who gathered in New York in early September this year, by adopting the Millennium Declaration recognized, inter alia, that, in addition to their separate responsibilities to their individual societies, they have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. The world leaders further agreed to spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.

We have a long list of activities to be performed with regard to the promotion of the concept of dialogue among civilizations. In carrying out such activities, the important thing to be borne in mind is how to enhance universal values to the benefit of humankind, while respecting the diversity of cultures, in a world which is getting smaller and ever more globalized. I am happy to note that a United Nations Trust Fund for the dialogue among civilizations was established last year to finance those activities.

We warmly welcome the designation of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The Republic of Korea will make its due contributions to the process of consultations and preparations so that 2001 can be remembered as the year that the first giant step was taken in the long march towards the promotion of universal values for humankind, including a permanent peace.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3369 (XXX) of 10 October 1975, I now call on the observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Hosseini (Organization of the Islamic Conference): It is a privilege for the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to address the General Assembly today on its agenda item 32, entitled "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations". In view of the impressive number of speakers who have shed light on the subject at this debate and the scarcity of time, my intervention will be brief.

At the outset, let me remind representatives of the interest of and initiatives taken by the OIC on this subject following the Assembly's adoption of its historic resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998. Our interest and actions in promoting the concept of the dialogue stem from the Charter of the OIC, which aims, among other things, at creating a suitable atmosphere for the promotion of cooperation and understanding among our member States and other countries of the world. We therefore have welcomed the decision of the General Assembly to proclaim 2001 the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and its invitation to plan and implement appropriate programmes to promote the concept of dialogue. In the same spirit, we have welcomed the appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We will do all we can to support his work and endeavours in the fulfilment of our common objectives in this direction.

We have read with much interest the Secretary-General's report, contained in document A/55/492/Rev.1, and are pleased to note that the OIC's report on its measures to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations figures in the material being made available for consultation in the United Nations Secretariat. We are also gratified to note that the list of eminent persons who have accepted the Secretary-General's invitation to cooperate with his Personal Representative in pursuing some thoughtful questions in connection with the dialogue includes some well-known personalities from the OIC member States.

We support the Secretary-General's plan to use the facilities of electronic media and television in an innovative way to promote direct and instant communication among peoples of different civilizations in the world today.

I now refer to the draft resolution that is before the Assembly in document number A/55/L.30. I am glad to be able to say that we participated in the drafting process. I take this opportunity to comment on operative paragraph 7, which notes with interest the activities undertaken and proposals made by Member States, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and international and regional organizations for the preparation of the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

In this connection, I am glad to report that an OIC intergovernmental group of experts, meeting in Jeddah in February and September of this year, worked on the preparation of the drafts of a global agenda for dialogue among civilizations and on a global programme of action, which are currently being reviewed by an ad hoc committee of the OIC here in New York. Both the Agenda and the Programme will be developed further in broader consultations at the United Nations during the Year of Dialogue. The OIC will, of course, be prepared to foster the objectives of the Year of Dialogue in several other ways in cooperation with the United Nations.

In conclusion, I reiterate the OIC's commitment to the principles and objectives of dialogue among civilizations, and we hope that the draft resolution before the Assembly will enjoy support.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Before proceeding to take action on the draft resolution, I should like to announce that since its publication the following countries have become sponsors of draft resolution A/55/L.30: Algeria, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Canada, the Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guinea, Guyana, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Portugal, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, Swaziland, Sweden, Thailand, Tunisia, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United Republic of Tanzania.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.30.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/55/L.30?

Draft resolution A/55/L.30 was adopted (resolution 55/23).

The Acting President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Akopian (Armenia): My delegation deeply regrets that the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan used today's agenda item for attacking another nation. He was the only speaker to do so. Such statements are in total contradiction of the very idea of a dialogue among civilizations, and they are capable of killing the dialogue in its cradle.

I would like to refer to some concrete cynical points. The representative of Azerbaijan presented his country as an example of ethnic tolerance, but he forgot to illustrate that statement with the massacres of Armenians in Sumgait in 1988 and in the capital city of Baku in 1990 — the first examples of ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe. He presented his country as an example of religious tolerance, but he did not mention that the only Armenian church in Baku has been destroyed and deserted — even though he claims that there are tens of thousands of Armenians still living in Baku, which is a propagandistic and groundless statement.

By repeating our statement made two weeks ago in this Hall, he insists that his country does not exploit religion for political purposes. I think that the use of mercenaries from certain countries and repeated calls for religious solidarity do not leave any doubt about who is exploiting religion for purely political reasons.

In our recent statement we confirmed once again that the fact that Armenia and Azerbaijan have different cultural and religious heritages should not be regarded as an obstacle, but rather as an opportunity to engage in a positive and constructive dialogue which would eventually create an atmosphere of much-needed mutual confidence and understanding between our countries.

In the not so distant past our countries were engaged in such a dialogue — a dialogue that I would prefer to call an interaction. This interaction contributed greatly to the mutual enrichment of both the Armenian and Azerbaijani cultures. Unfortunately, that dialogue has been interrupted, but the ongoing political dialogue between our countries gives us hope that, in the near future, the spiritual dialogue will follow.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): In connection with the statement made by the representative of Armenia. It is unfortunate that, despite the topic of the item under consideration, the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, the Armenian representative, as all present can see, is pursuing other goals. To be perfectly honest, he is continuing the aggressive strategy of his country against mine — the Republic of Azerbaijan.

In December 1987, it was Armenia that forcibly expelled its more than 4,000 citizens of Azerbaijani origin from the city of Kafan. Those people, suddenly deprived of everything during the severe winter of that year found refuge in Azerbaijan. That was the very first provocative and violent action of the well-thought-out policy of Armenia that fuelled the conflict between the two countries. It might be noted that today Armenia is almost a mono-ethnic country.

In April 1992, it was units of the armed forces of Armenia that committed one of the bloodiest crimes in modern history. Having razed the Azerbaijani town of Khajeli, they mercilessly destroyed hundreds of helpless innocent people. As a result of atrocities by criminal military units, more than 600 inhabitants of Khajeli were brutally killed.

As for the Armenian church in Baku, the church is safe, but evidently it is closed.

There is an excellent Russian proverb that precisely describes the actions of the representative of Armenia: "a guilty conscience betrays itself".

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Armenia, who wishes to speak a second time in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Akopian (Armenia): First, even if one were to accept that some mythical Azeri population was expelled from Armenia — and that is totally false — the Azerbaijani representative has to admit that no Azeri population has been massacred in Armenia since the beginning of the conflict. Secondly, with regard to the events in Khojali, allow me to remind him that, even if one were to agree that some massacres did take place in Khojali, they took place after the Armenian pogroms in Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku, which may be described as acts of genocide. All these events took place after the Azerbaijani aggression against Nagorny Karabakh in 1992, which were aimed at the final ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population of Nagorny Karabakh.

As for the Armenian church in Baku, I have with me a journal that any interested delegation can see, and I also have a photograph taken by an independent American journalist that shows the current status of the Armenian church in Baku.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Azerbaijan, who wishes to speak a second time in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): I would like to invite all representatives here to visit Baku and to check the status of the Armenian church.

With regard to the so-called colonial domination by the Soviets and the foreign occupation by Azerbaijan of Nagorny Karabakh, I congratulate the representative of Armenia on the invention of a new subterfuge — I would call it "subterfuge 2000" — that followed the previous one – the so-called blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan. May I remind him that so-called blockaded Armenia borders not only Azerbaijan but also three other countries of the region.

If Armenia had really been blockaded and totally cut off, the outside world — the Security Council — would have acted accordingly. Instead, the Security Council, the highest international body responsible for international peace and security, dealt with the conflict and in 1993 adopted four resolutions — 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993) — expressing its serious concern at the deterioration of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and at the tensions between them and at the continuation of, I emphasize, the conflict in and around the Nagorny Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 32?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.